

# T-CARE®

Teachers Connecting to Advance  
Retention and Empowerment



Volume 4

## Addressing the Special Needs of Your Students

by Dr. Nancy Burstein

Most of us become teachers because we want to make a difference in the lives of our students. Like many of you, I joined the teaching force, committed to educating students. I was interested in becoming an elementary education teacher but as I began working in classrooms, I found that I was drawn to children who needed extra help – students with academic and behavioral challenges and particularly those from poor urban areas. I decided to pursue a career in special education, focusing on students with mild to moderate disabilities from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. These special education students were typically segregated in classrooms on a general education school campus and the special educator had little interaction with general education teachers. However, much has changed over the years. Today, students with disabilities are increasingly placed in general education classrooms and educated alongside their typical peers.

Students with disabilities are not unlike others in your classrooms; they have learn-

ing strengths and weaknesses. However, they typically need additional support in learning, as do many other students with special needs in today's increasingly diverse classrooms. Teachers cannot use a "one size fits all" instructional model for teaching; they must differentiate

instruction according to students' needs. To maximize the resources in schools in addressing the educational needs of *all* students, it is critical that general and special educators work together; their combined expertise contributes directly to enhancing the education of every student in the classroom, regardless of her or his needs. In some schools teachers work together informally, collaboratively planning and teaching with one another. In other schools, systems are embedded throughout the school culture to support collaboration, teaming, and consultation. I urge you to work



*Dr. Nancy Burstein is  
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at CSUN*

with administrators and staff to build a school environment that facilitates collaboration among general and special educators. The benefits are invaluable.

In this newsletter, dedicated to students with special needs, you will read about ways that general and special education teachers can work together to support

*all* students in the classroom. Dr. Sally Spencer, Assistant Professor at CSUN, will share information on Universal Design, a proactive educational approach that uses inclusive instructional strategies that benefit a broad range of learners including students with disabilities. Dr. Wendy Murawski, Associate Professor at CSUN, will discuss strategies that focus on team teaching. Finally, Susana Gomez-Judkins, principal at Colfax Elementary School, will provide helpful hints in serving students with special needs that may work in your school.

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CSUN Professor  
and Chair of  
Special Education

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See your letter in our next edition. Please submit your questions for  
"The Doctors Are In" to: [T-CARE@csun.edu](mailto:T-CARE@csun.edu)

## Collaborative Teaching

by Wendy W. Murawski, Ph.D.

**“Co-teaching is a real connection that gives us a partner to share our successes and help us through our issues.”**

**T-CARE** is about teachers connecting. Connecting to support one another, to share ideas, and to vent. Connecting to help one another learn strategies, to reduce stress, and to keep energized. Teaching is a job that is exhausting and exciting, frustrating and fantastic, stressful and soul-fulfilling, merciless and meaningful. If you are a new teacher who is starting to recognize how all-encompassing this job really is, my very best advice to you is...start making some connections!

My first year of teaching I was fortunate enough to connect with Linda Hutchinson. Linda was a veteran English teacher; I was a novice part-time Special Education/ part-time German teacher. We sat next to each other in a beginning of the year meeting and immediately made a connection – we both had somewhat wicked senses of humor. We ended up teaching together that year and for the next three years. That connection led to what is now my passion and area for research, teaching, publication, and public speaking....Co-Teaching!

Co-teaching is a practice by which two teachers share the planning, instructing and assessing of a group of students in the same classroom. This connection may occur for one period of the day or for a subject matter or for a whole day. Linda and I only co-taught for one period a day but man, did we recognize the benefit of sharing, venting, communicating, and helping one another. In fact, our regular collaboration resulted in benefits for us but also –and more importantly – in benefits for the students in the class as well, both those with and without disabilities.

As Linda and I planned together, we both brought in our various areas of expertise. Linda knew the content and where we were going in the long run; I knew instructional best practices for individualization, differentiation, modification and positive behavior support. Together, we had a ball planning lessons that the kids learned from and actually even enjoyed!

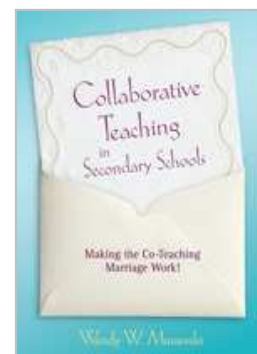
While some grade level or subject matter teachers may join together to co-teach a topic, unit or concept, co-teaching most often occurs with a general education teacher and a special service provider (special education teacher, Title I teacher, speech/language pathologist, etc). The rationale for schools to pair these individuals is legal, ethical, and instructional. Legally, all students are entitled to a highly qualified content teacher and access to the same content and assessments per No Child Left Behind. Students with disabilities are also expected to be taught in the least restrictive environment, which is most often considered the general education classroom, as per the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act. Sure, there is legal rationale for doing this but, as far as we were concerned, this just made sense. I didn't know English the way Linda did and she didn't know how to teach different learners the way I did. Ethically, it makes sense that all children are provided access to the same curriculum. The concept known as *inclusion* emphasizes the philosophy that kids should be kept with their same age peers whenever possible. Instructionally, just look at today's typical classroom. There are students who are gifted, have disabilities, are English Language Learners, are on 504 plans, are struggling emotionally, and on and

on. Why *wouldn't* we want to have a buddy to help us with this?

I always liken co-teaching to a marriage (Murawski, 2009). Two individuals are working together on a regular basis to raise children. We make decisions that impact their academics, behavior, social skills and self-esteem. We don't want the kids to play Mom against Dad and we have to communicate if we want it to work. Co-teaching is a real connection that gives us a partner to share our successes and help us through our issues.

I have to admit I took my own marriage analogy a bit far. A few years after Linda and I started co-teaching, she convinced me to meet her son, Christien. We are now married. Suffice it to say, if you are single and looking – co-teaching is a great way to make *real* connections. Let's face it....if you can co-teach with your mother-in-law, you can co-teach with anyone!

Reference:  
Murawski, W.W. (2009). *Collaborative Teaching in [Secondary/Elementary] Schools: Making the Co-Teaching Marriage Work!* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press. Available through [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) or [www.corwinpress.com](http://www.corwinpress.com)



Wendy W. Murawski is an Associate Professor of Special Education at CSUN



*"How do I keep my personal stresses (family, health, etc.) from affecting my attitude in the classroom?"* --Stressed and concerned

Dear Stressed and Concerned,

First, you should commend yourself for having the self-awareness to see that the way you are feeling can have a strong impact on how you are performing in the classroom. It's also helpful for you to know that this is true for all of us. One of the primary missions of the T-CARE program is to normalize the experience of stress and to thereby help teachers to cope with it in a way that enables them to do their best work in spite of it.

There are things we can do to reduce the stresses that are around us. For instance, we can try to develop closer relationships with our co-workers. These relationships can help us by providing a means of problem-solving to make positive changes in our work environment. Also, there is a value in having friends with whom we can "vent."

Venting and problem-solving can be very helpful, but they can be draining if engaged in too frequently. For this reason, a completely different means of coping is to try to look within yourself to try to assess how deeply these difficulties are impacting you and why. It is normal and healthy to experience disappointments as unwanted. For instance, it is normal to dislike being treated disrespectfully, performing poorly, or working within poorly operating systems. But all of these happen; in fact, they are inevitable. We are more likely to cope effectively if we find a way to receive these disappointments as unpleasant but inevitable. When the disappointments emanate from our family, the process of coping can be much more difficult. At these

times it can be very helpful to look within yourself. Try to gain an understanding of what is especially personal and painful about this particular experience. For instance, does this experience cause you to think in certain ways? Do you find yourself thinking in critical ways of yourself? Why do you think you are doing that in the context of these experiences? How, specifically, might these patterns in your thoughts and feelings be exhibiting themselves in your behaviors in the classroom?

The questions just asked can be extremely helpful if addressed with a mental health professional. You might also benefit from meditating on these questions as part of a relaxation exercise or a religious or spiritual practice. It is also normal to sometimes become "injured" psychically, just like we sometimes bruise ourselves, physically. There are extremely effective short-term, goal-directed methods of individual psychotherapy and there are also effective methods of group therapy. As a helper, it is especially important to give yourself the gift of care when you need it.

*Dr. Corinne Barker & Dr. Alan Goodwin are  
Licensed Clinical Psychologists*

## From the trenches...

The stress dreams started for me in July, if not earlier. Nightmare after nightmare, all about the same thing – it's the first day of school and I hadn't planned a thing. A sea of faces looking at me to lead, and a blank lesson plan book in my hands. No matter how long we student teach, or how many lessons we create, nothing could have prepared me for that single terrifying moment when I became a classroom teacher – alone and in charge.

I am happy to report that the teaching instinct does kick in, and the moment the students walked in the door I felt fine. Nonetheless, this has been the hardest, most intense, most overwhelming experience of my life. There were so many things I felt completely unprepared and untrained for. Sure, I knew how to write lessons and assess students, but how was I supposed to organize a classroom? How do I get the class to enter the room quietly

each morning? Was it all right to take the last of the butcher paper in the supply room?

Before the year started I met with my students' former teachers to learn all about them. With a stack of index cards in my hand I wrote each child's name and a list of their needs and their learning styles. I studied IEP's and prepared for my students with special needs. But once I met these students, and started teaching them for myself, all this seemed meaningless. The more I taught, the less I thought about labels and diagnoses, and the more I thought about each student's individual personality and needs.

The students, of course, are way ahead of me. Many of them having been attending this school since kindergarten, and they never seem to label each other. Every day I see typical students work side by side with their classmates with special needs. They help each

other and teach each other. I am sure this is helping everyone to become more compassionate and understanding.

I know that being a first year teacher anywhere is overwhelming, but I work at a school where we create our own curriculum and differentiate it as needed. This not only allows for the needed creative freedom, but also a lot of additional work. I have a special education co-teacher, and together with the other fourth-grade teacher we create and modify assignments as needed. It leads to a lot of long nights, but we are trying to make the curriculum accessible and meaningful to all students.

Our school's motto is, "Quality Education for All." The unofficial one seems to be, "We are going to treat everyone differently, because that's what is fair." One of the things I love most about my school is how well the students understand that – and I am happily working to achieve that!

*Anna Fink, CHIME Charter Elementary  
First Year Teacher*

# Universal Design for Learning

by Sally Spencer, Ed.D.

One of the biggest concerns we often hear from new teachers is “How can I reach my students with disabilities?” Although most teachers get some training in differentiating lessons in their credential programs, many feel it isn’t enough, and meeting the diverse needs of students in a general education class can be overwhelming.

The answer is Universal Design for Learning. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a method of lesson planning that helps you plan for *all* your students, so that your lessons are accessible to everyone in your class. Instead of trying to create modifications and accommodations for your students after the fact, UDL helps you plan for them proactively, so your lessons are ready-to-go with approaches and strategies that will work for all your kids.

Here’s how it works, in a nutshell. (What I’m giving you here is the super-brief “Twitter” explanation. If you want to learn about UDL in more depth, please investigate one of the resources listed at the end of this article.) There are three things you need to think about when you are planning: How will I *teach* the content to make it accessible? (REPRESENTATION). How will the students *express* what they learned? (EXPRESSION). And how will I *motivate* all my learners? (ENGAGEMENT). Those three concepts are the keys to UDL. Let’s give it a try.

**Planning With UDL**

Imagine I am planning a social studies lesson about the 13 colonies. In the past I would probably decide to have the fifth-graders read from the social studies textbook, do a brief discussion on the content of the chapter, then answer the questions at the end of the chapter. A nice, typical social studies lesson. After I planned my lesson, I would think about how to modify it for my students with special needs—those that can’t decode, those with attention problems, those who are gifted, etc.

So how can I *proactively* help this diverse group? Plan the lesson using UDL. First let’s consider the *teaching* part of the UDL equation-- REPRESENTATION. What can I do in my *teaching* that will make the content more accessible? I know that UDL supports **activating background knowledge**. We are going to play a quick game of Jeopardy to review the American history we’ve learned previously. Games are really **motivating to lots of kids** who don’t really like “boring book stuff”. That’s the UDL principle of ENGAGEMENT.

Before we read, I’ve found a great video on “You Tube” about the colonies, and I’m going to show that to catch their interest and to present the content in a visual way. Because I know that lots of kids have trouble getting any real information out of a video, we’re going to watch it in chunks. After each section of the video, we’ll go into the text and read

about that particular topic. That makes the content come alive for the kids, and supports comprehension for everyone.

Now I need to think about how the kids can EXPRESS what they have learned, focusing on the UDL principle of **providing choices** to the students. They can: Write a short play, write a poem, make a poster, make a Power Point presentation, answer the questions in the textbook, give an oral presentation, write something on the computer, dictate their answers into a tape recorder, or dictate their answers onto the computer. By giving them choices in how they EXPRESS their learning, I am jumping right over attention problems and writing problems. **Students can just pick a choice that engages them** and plays to their strengths (ENGAGEMENT).

*Want to know more?*

Check out the following resources for more information on using UDL in your classroom:

*Differentiated Instruction: Collaborative Planning and Instruction for Universally Designed Learning* by Jacqueline S. Thousand, Richard A. Villa & Ann I. Nevin (2007)

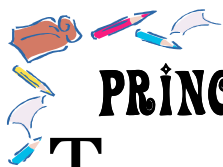
Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST): <http://www.cast.org/teachingeverystudent>

*Universal Design for Learning* by the Council for Exceptional Children (2005)

*Dr. Sally Spencer is an Assistant Professor of Special Education at CSUN*

**“Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a method of lesson planning that helps you plan for all your students”**





## PRINCIPAL'S CORNER

The school year is off to a wonderful start and it feels like we're moving at full throttle. By this time of the year most classroom routines and procedures have been set and barring any major reorganization of classes, most teachers are humming along in their weekly routines. As the first formal assessments in Language Arts and Math are administered, a clearer picture begins to emerge about which students are struggling to achieve. How can teachers make certain that no student slips through the cracks?

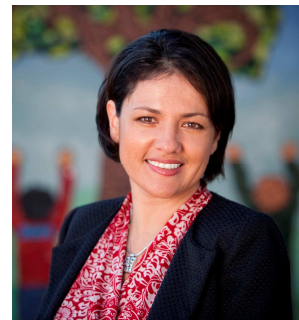
A teacher's first priority is to maximize the instructional **time** and the **quality**

of instruction for *all* students. This can best be achieved by working with grade level colleagues to share best management and instructional strategies. We often joke about "stealing" ideas and best practices from our colleagues. The truth is two professionals are better than one.

A great place to start is to identify a problem area. Collecting and summarizing data from both formal and informal assessments reveal expected and surprising areas of need. Once an area of need is determined, teachers can hone in on sharing best practices to remedy common problems.

1. Identify standards that are common areas of need
2. Share effective strategies with colleagues. Try out the strategies to see if it fits your teaching style
3. Get and give feedback about the strategy implementation
4. Collect data to measure the effectiveness of the strategy

This focused approach to sharing best practices, trying new instructional strategies, and evaluating the effectiveness of the strategy leads to more effective high-quality first instruction.

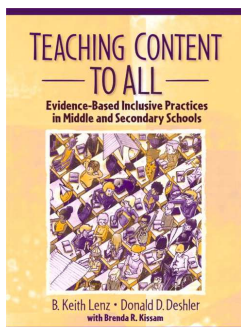


Susana Gomez-Judkins,  
Principal Colfax Charter  
Elementary School.

Colfax is a California  
Distinguished School  
and a Music Center  
Bravo Award Winner

## T-CARE Recommends...

### Teaching Content to All by K. Lenz and D. Deshler



It helps secondary teachers understand academic diversity among students and then plan for and implement instruction that reaches all students. The text addresses the unique chal-

lenges faced by secondary educators committed to inclusion and to meeting standards for all students.

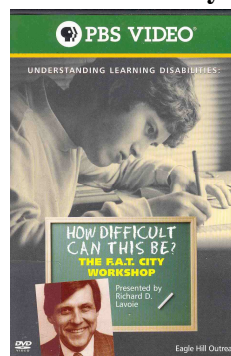
includes what every secondary teacher needs to know about instructing students with different learning needs.

lenges faced by secondary educators committed to inclusion and to meeting standards for all students.

Teaching Content to All explains research-based teaching techniques and strategies based on understanding instructional goals rather than simply implementing isolated teaching tools.

Examples are heavily oriented toward the content areas, and the planning and teaching routines it presents are easily adaptable across the curriculum by both general and special educators. The material can be adapted for the elementary grades.

### How Difficult Can This Be? The F.A.T. City Workshop (DVD)



This unique program lets viewers experience the frustration, anxiety, and tension faced by children with learning disabilities. Workshop facilitator **Richard Lavoie** presents a series

of striking simulations emulating daily experience of LD children. Teachers, social workers, and parents, workshop participants, reflect upon how the workshop changed their approach to LD children. Includes discussion of mainstreaming discipline and self-concept.

# T-CARE

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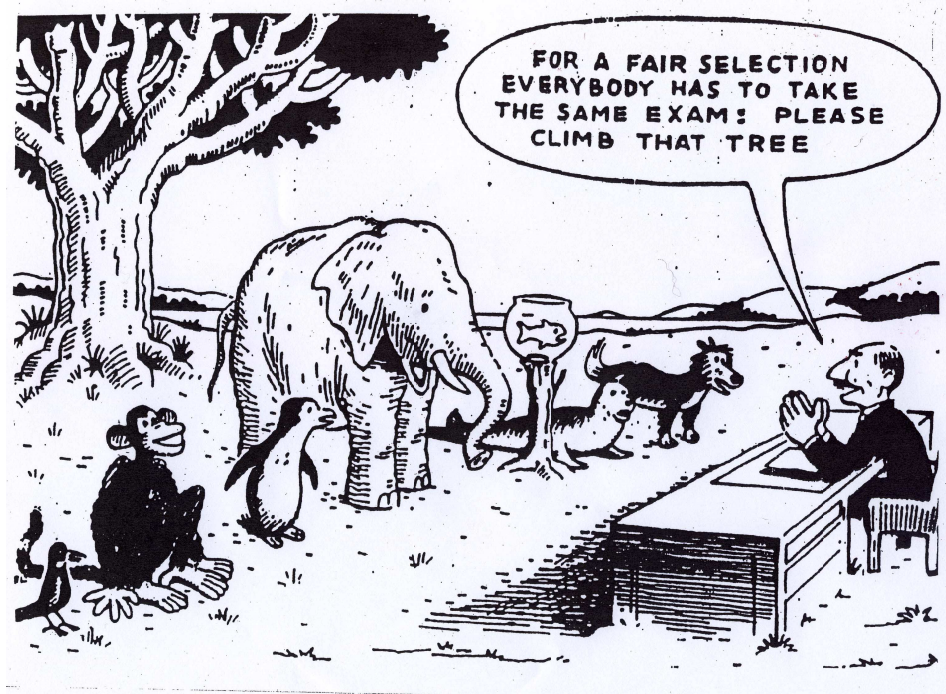
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## Closing Thoughts



## Links to Visit:



[www.csun.edu/education/ctl/tcare](http://www.csun.edu/education/ctl/tcare)

[www.callutheran.edu/counseling\\_services/](http://www.callutheran.edu/counseling_services/)

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**T-CARE is dedicated to help teaching professionals, at all experience levels, to explore the developmental stages in their career. Through this process, T-CARE will endeavor to establish and maintain a close, mutually-supportive network of teaching professionals who will work together to:**

- gain a deep appreciation for the challenges all helping professionals confront,
- sensitize teaching professional to the value of cognitive and behavioral self-affirming practices, and
- help them to develop higher levels of resiliency and job satisfaction.